Stability Operations II: Adjustments

As U.S. troops occupied the newly established LOC, the military advantage in Santo Domingo shifted irrevocably in their favor. The Constitutionalists could no longer expect to achieve their goals by force of arms. What uncertainty remained concerned the resolution of the crisis. Would there be a diplomatic or military solution? The decision lay with Washington, where President Johnson remained determined to negotiate an end to the civil war. A political settlement involving all Dominican factions, save the extreme left, would presumably be longer lasting and less damaging to America's image in the hemisphere than a settlement imposed by military action. There was, however, one serious drawback to a diplomatic approach: the conditions for its success were not readily at hand. Although surrounded by U.S. marines and paratroopers, the Constitutionalists were in no mood to capitulate. And although the American military presence curtailed much of the wanton killing, the passions and hatred generated during a week of civil war would not be readily allayed. As for the cease-fire arranged on 30 April, both Constitutionalists and Loyalists violated it at will.

As U.S. forces settled in to await resolution of the crisis, several adjustments had to be made. Additional troops and supporting units well beyond those specified in the original contingency plans had to be prepared, deployed, and provided appropriate and adequate supplies. Communications had to be upgraded, and the quality of political and military intelligence improved. A simplified and more efficient command structure was desperately needed. Most of these adjustments would be made before mid-May. Meanwhile, U.S. officials and military officers monitored political developments, which during this two-week period included the formation of two rival Dominican governments, a new cease-fire agreement, a bitter propaganda war, and the arrival of more presidential emissaries from Washington.

Although the crisis had entered a political phase, American troops had to maintain their vigilance against military threats, which up to late May meant the hostile acts of rebel forces to the north and south of the LOC. Also, U.S. commanders had to be prepared to undertake major military initiatives should a breakdown in the diplomatic process occur. Contingency plans had to be ready for a variety of operations, from clearing the rem-

nants of rebel bands from the northern part of Santo Domingo to an all-out attack against the rebel stronghold in Ciudad Nueva.

From the first day of their arrival, U.S. forces in the Dominican Republic began adjusting to the reality they faced and the deficiencies they detected. Inevitably, difficulties arose. Some stemmed from situations over which the United States had little or no control. Others appeared as the intervention, to LBJ's chagrin, began to take on the characteristics of an occupation. Still others reflected shortcomings that had plagued joint operations and political-military coordination in Power Pack from its beginning. When problems developed, flexibility and adaptability became as critical as training and discipline to those trying to devise solutions. Often the determinant of success or failure was simply the knack of knowing when to do something "by the book" and when to throw "the book" away.

* * *

By mid-May, the buildup of U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine units in and near the Dominican Republic reached a peak of nearly 24,000 troops. Included in this figure were the 5th Logistics Command, the 15th Field Hospital, the 503d Military Police Battalion, the 50th Signal Battalion, the 218th Military Intelligence (MI) Detachment, the 519th MI Battalion, the 1st Psychological Warfare Battalion, the 42d Civil Affairs Company, and the 7th Special Forces Group. After the White House meeting on 1 May, the Air Force also received orders to move a tactical fighter squadron and a tactical reconnaissance element to Ramey AFB. Prior to the deployment of the 82d, York and Brigadier General Delashaw, the vice commander of the Nineteenth Air Force, had approved plans for the fighters to establish U.S. air superiority over the Dominican Republic and provide escort to the division's initial assault force. When the 3d Brigade departed Pope AFB, however, the tactical fighters were left at Homestead AFB in the United States, a gross violation of doctrine, but one the Joint Chiefs were willing to chance given the political and military urgency of getting the troops to Santo Domingo and the low probability that Cuban aircraft (the Dominican rebels had no air capability) would interfere with the airlift. The squadron of F-100s arrived at Ramey AFB on 2 May. Later, twelve F-104s augmented this group. Until the fighters returned to the United States on 1 June, two planes on a rotational basis were kept on station over the Dominican Republic at all times.[1]

The two principal units composing the intervention continued to be the 82d Airborne Division and the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, the combat elements of which had all deployed to the Dominican Republic by 4 May. Within a week of his arrival at San Isidro, General Palmer had at his disposal nine airborne infantry battalions, an airborne cavalry reconnaissance squadron, and three Marine battalions ashore, with another Marine battalion off shore in reserve. Most of the marines and some other units came to the Dominican Republic in surface transportation; the majority of U.S. troops arrived in aircraft. The airlift, mounted in support of an operation four times larger than that anticipated under outdated Army and Air Force plans, was impressive. TAC managed to assemble 147 C-130s

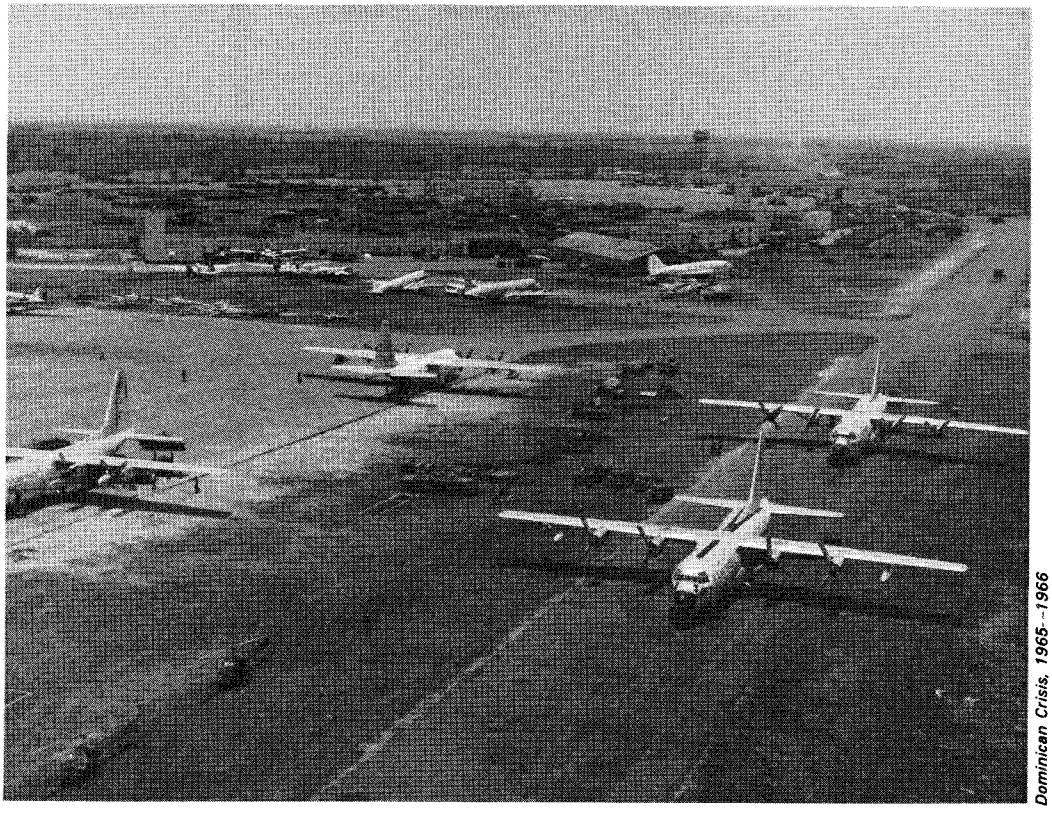
from airfields around the country, the Military Air Transport Service provided up to 57 C-130s and 90 C-124s, and the reserve forces of the Continental Air Command furnished 19 C-119s. By 7 May, these aircraft accounted for 1,600 accident-free sorties, in which the crews flew to San Isidro and recycled back to Pope to pick up further loads before returning to San Isidro. It was a grueling schedule aggravated by frequent bad weather, few navigational aids, and inadequate briefings on required formations. Adverse conditions notwithstanding, the crews unloaded 16,500 troops and 16,000 tons of equipment and supplies in the Dominican Republic before operations began to wind down after the 7th.[2]

In assessing the airlift as a whole, Army commanders offered praise no less ebullient than that of their Air Force counterparts. Yet when these same Army commanders examined specific aspects of the airlift, praise occasionally yielded to irritation. Hasty planning and haphazard loading procedures resulted in some aircraft arriving at San Isidro without their full loads of equipment and supplies or with trucks, jeeps, and other vehicles not crammed, as they should have been, with rations, water, and ammunition. More critical, the JCS, Palmer, and York all stressed that combat troops should be deployed with "minimum essential equipment." Yet despite these explicit instructions, they could not at first convince those responsible for loading the aircraft that much of the heavy equipment preplanned to accompany each Power Pack element was not needed. Although York understood that readjusting force packages was a "herculean task," he had no sympathy for anyone who refused to make adjustments simply because they were not "according to plan." The general had, for example, all the 2½-ton trucks he needed yet continued to get more. "It appears," he later observed, "that in some respects the Army is still fighting World War II. The back-up required to fight an *SS* division in Europe is not a good guide to use when determining the support required to fight irregular forces in stability operations." The 82d did not need every item on its TOE. "We must," he concluded, "in conjunction with the Air Force, develop procedures permitting great flexibility and quick response to changing tactical and support requirements."[3]

During the first phase of the Power Pack airlift, Palmer echoed York in complaining about the Air Force's slavish devotion to preplanned "packaging" procedures. Not only did Palmer experience delays in getting the combat units he needed, but he also found it difficult to obtain priority seating for intelligence analysts, military police, and civil affairs and signal personnel and other specialists needed in larger numbers than estimated in the original plans. Palmer's irritation over inflexible procedures was not assuaged when chaos engulfed the airlift after the deployment of Power Pack's first echelon. As the general noted later, only Power Pack I moved to San Isidro as a clearly defined package, after which the requirement to identify units in subsequent packages was "either forgotten or ignored." The schedule according to which later echelons deployed further aroused Palmer's ire. He and York argued that aircraft in the initial assault package returning to Pope should be permitted to depart again for San

Isidro as soon as they were loaded with men and supplies. What both generals wanted was for the JCS to authorize a continuous, around-the-clock "airstream" of recycling transports. The appeal made little headway at first. Reluctant to depart from established procedures, the JCS would authorize departures from Pope only after all the planes in a given package had been loaded. This serial approach, in York's opinion, was a mistake in that it caused fatigue among troops who, once aboard the C-130s, were required to wait an inordinate time until other planes were loaded and the JCS issued an execute order. For his part, Palmer cited the enormous problems the serial approach created at San Isidro when aircraft in a given package, arriving within minutes of each other, overtaxed the limited landing and unloading facilities at the airfield. The absence of standard procedures for handling incoming aircraft at San Isidro during the first several days further aggravated the situation. The JCS finally authorized an airstream operation but only after representatives of the 82d made numerous and vigorous remonstrations.[4]

In suggesting ways to overcome the problems experienced with the airlift during the Dominican crisis, Palmer recommended that the troop list in an OPLAN be "treated as a shopping list from which the commander



Dominican Crisis, 1965–1966

C-130 transports lined up at San Isidro

charged with execution of the plan can request units according to the actual situation in the objective area." York seconded this suggestion by urging those responsible for preparing the troop, equipment, and supply lists to heed the requirements of the ground commander in distinguishing what was "really necessary" from what was "nice to have." In perhaps the most telling comment of all, York intimated that had the situation in the Dominican Republic been "more volatile," the inflexibility of a packaging system that denied the necessary priority to troops and additional ammunition could have left the 82d highly vulnerable during the first days of the intervention.[5]

For the marines and paratroopers entering the Dominican Republic, whatever confusion or delays they might have experienced getting there were quickly forgotten once they began acclimating themselves to an unfamiliar country and carrying out their specific missions. For elements of the 4th MEB, that meant securing the ISZ until units of an inter-American peace force then being assembled could assume the responsibility.[6] As for the cavalry squadron and nine airborne infantry battalions of the 82d, their assignments encompassed three locations. In the area around San Isidro, a brigade took part in training exercises while providing security for the airfield, the division reserve, and the 82d's command post (which had been moved after only a few days from the noisy hangar at San Isidro to rooms in a military academy nearby). Another brigade of two battalions was deployed to secure positions along the Ozama River and the eastern approaches to the Duarte bridge. Of "primary interest" was the area west of the Ozama, including the LOC, "which was used as the focal point for mission assignment and unit rotation." Because of the intense activity along the LOC, the brigade task force of three battalions that initially occupied the area was reinforced by a fourth battalion on 8 May. According to a plan devised by York, all "infantry battalions were rotated within the area of operations so that each battalion would become familiar with each specific mission and get combat initiated," receiving "practical experience in conducting relief-in-place, in defense of a river line and in operations in built up areas." Other units organic to the division, together with nondivisional elements, set up operations in the most available places they could find that would enable them to perform their tasks efficiently and in safety.[7]

* * *

As the troops arrived in the Dominican Republic, their impressions of the country varied. Some were struck most by the "searing sun" and the way it was blotted out virtually every afternoon by torrential rains; others by the "just plain squalor" of the city and the sight of naked children playing in mud puddles; others by the condition of the wartime capital, in which garbage littered the streets, electrical power and telephone service worked sporadically, and food and water were scarce commodities; and still others by the range of emotions with which the noncombatant population greeted a foreign army—emotions ranging from friendly welcomes to vulgar hostility. Whatever their initial impressions, all soldiers from Palmer and

Dominican Crisis, 1965—1966

A paratrooper manning his position at the Duarte bridge

York down to the enlisted men manning their posts shared one basic need: a desire for information on the situation they faced.

For the commanders, the list of intelligence requirements was interminable, encompassing both political and military, strategic and tactical, geographical and psychological, logistical and legal information. For the combat soldier, the list was shorter: he wished only to know about the men trying to kill him. Few American troops, particularly those in the first waves, had been adequately briefed, yet almost to a man, they assumed that the rebels were the enemy. The fighting required to establish U.S. positions in the ISZ, along the Ozama, and within the LOC, together with the constant sniping and firefights that followed, transformed assumption into conviction. So, too, did the contrast between the treatment accorded those soldiers who came into contact with Loyalist troops and those who, because of inaccurate maps or unfamiliarity with the city, strayed into rebel territory: from the Loyalists, one could expect friendly conversation and a cold beer, from the rebels, a bullet or a harsh interrogation and public denunciation for propaganda purposes (after which those who survived their errant wanderings in Ciudad Nueva were usually returned to American lines promptly). Military briefers quickly adopted the practice of referring to the Loyalists as "friendlies," the Constitutionalists as "unfriendlies." Talk among American soldiers about "killing commies" or going downtown to "finish them off" also betrayed more than a hint of partisanship. As one "exasperated" colonel put it, "What the hell, those who shoot at us are the enemy and those who don't are friends." The logic seemed irrefutable, but when the media reported the discrepancy between these statements and the formal proclamations of U.S. neutrality emanating from Washington and the U.S. Embassy, the credibility of the administration and the military was again called into question.[8]

Official proclamations notwithstanding, for soldiers under fire it was an easy task to identify the enemy. It was quite another to acquire current, accurate intelligence as to his numbers, leaders, armaments, deployment, and organization. When York and Palmer arrived at San Isidro, that kind of reliable information was simply not available to them or their subordinates. "Information concerning the enemy was practically non-existent," complained one unit afterward. Nor did higher headquarters and other U.S.-based sources provide much enlightenment. The first CINCLANT intelligence summary arrived midmorning on 1 May but did little to clarify the situation. As for information provided by the Continental Army Tactical Intelligence Center, Palmer's assessment was blunt: following the deployment of troops, it was of no value, the organization not having the assets to support a corps in the field. For the general, "The immediate G2 task consisted of discharging current Order of Battle data on rebel forces to meet urgent tactical needs." Because that intelligence would have to be derived on the scene, the first thing to do was to contact individuals in the Dominican Republic who had already collected information pertinent to the Army's needs. Divisional intelligence assets, augmented by elements of the 519th MI Battalion sent from Bragg, established liaison with CIA, Embassy, MAAG, JTF 122, Marine Corps, and Dominican intelligence personnel during the first days of the intervention.[9] Approaches to Peace Corps workers also yielded some valuable information, even though many of the young volunteers, sympathetic to the Constitutionalist cause, resented their government's attempts to suppress the revolt.

An overlay from the 4th MEB helped update U.S. maps, while information from most of the other sources proved useful. If the military had any problem in the exchange of data, it was with the CIA. The record here seems mixed. Some U.S. military intelligence officers benefited from their contacts with their CIA counterparts; others complained that agency men were inept amateurs who refused to share information, possibly because they did not possess any worth sharing. When LBJ sent twenty-four Spanish-speaking agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation into Santo Domingo, the move was widely interpreted as the president's attempt to establish a reliable intelligence operation in the wake of what he considered to be the unsatisfactory performance of the CIA, especially in the area of compiling a credible list of Communist agents taking part in the revolt. Military intelligence officers found the FBI competent, professional, and willing to share what information it accumulated on Dominican Communists and their links with American academicians and other groups in the States. The CIA held a lower opinion of FBI competency, although the agency's new chief of station managed to establish a cordial working relationship with the head of the FBI team, a personal friend.[10]

Palmer's headquarters and the 82d both suffered from shortages of intelligence personnel, including those Spanish-speaking MI officers who had been sent to Vietnam. Furthermore, the equipment designed to intercept enemy communications was built for use against the Soviet Union; it proved incapable of picking up rebel transmissions from cheap Japanese

walkie-talkies. Despite these drawbacks, the Army managed within the first week of the intervention to mount a comprehensive and highly informative intelligence operation. The first real breakthrough came at the tactical level, when the 3d Brigade patrols made their initial linkup with the marines on 1 May. In their trek across the city, the patrols reported rebel roadblock, sniper, and machine-gun positions; the kinds of small arms the rebels were using; the intensity of the opposition; and the fact that the Constitutionalists possessed at least some tanks captured from *CEFA* forces. With the establishment of the LOC, information from frontline troops inundated the corps and divisional G2 and threatened to swamp the meager staffs. In the meantime, U.S. counterintelligence specialists began compiling personality files and lists that categorized rebel activists according to their political affiliation, ideological commitments, and degrees of involvement in the revolt. The files and lists had to be built from raw information because the CIA and Embassy staffs had burned many of their records during the early days of the revolt out of fear the Embassy might be overrun.[11]

Of enormous value to the Army's intelligence-counterintelligence effort was the human intelligence (HUMINT) contained in "Detainee Interrogation Reports." On the morning of 1 May, the 3d Brigade requested transportation for prisoners of war, who were "coming in bunches." At first, the XVIII and 82d were not sure what to do with the prisoners, who, to avoid legal complications, would thereafter be referred to as "detainees." Without adequate facilities or military police to handle rebels who surrendered or were captured, U.S. troops turned the first group of detainees over to the junta, which apparently executed them soon afterwards. Appalled, U.S. Army commanders accelerated efforts to acquire more military police, to turn the division's Detainee Collection Point into a detainee center, and to set up a corps detainee center in the Sans Souci peninsula at the southernmost point of the Ozama's east bank. Once these facilities became operational, detainees would receive their initial interrogations at makeshift brigade holding areas and then be sent to Sans Souci. There, MI teams, counterintelligence officers, and others in need of information attended the interrogation sessions.[12]

The sessions at Sans Souci did not go smoothly at first. Although official files indicated that nearly all U.S. interrogators spoke fluent Spanish, in reality, many did not. To address this problem, MI officers requested that Hispanic-American paratroopers be assigned to the corps' detainee center, but brigade and battalion commanders were reluctant to deplete the 82d's Spanish-speaking assets in the LOC. Consequently, Puerto Rican soldiers were sent directly from their country to Sans Souci. There, they were to serve as interpreters until those interrogators with only a rudimentary knowledge of Spanish could, through on-the-job training, attain the proficiency necessary for conducting interviews on their own. This stopgap measure solved one problem but created another. The fact that most rebels were not Communists but men fighting for a return to constitutional government convinced several of the newly arrived Puerto Ricans that the United States was backing the wrong side in the civil war. (Many

Dominican Crisis, 1965–1966

Paratroopers cover group of suspected rebels

non-Puerto Ricans among the U.S. troops in Santo Domingo, it should be noted, shared this view.) Sympathy for rebel ideals led some Puerto Ricans to misinterpret questions and answers in deliberate attempts to keep individual detainees out of trouble. When caught, the offending interpreters were transferred out of the area. These isolated incidents did not appreciably affect the quality of intelligence coming out of Sans Souci. They did demonstrate that the U.S. military was not impervious to the controversy surrounding the Dominican intervention.[13]

The operation at San Souci provided interested U.S. parties not only with tactical intelligence of a strictly military value but with political information concerning the motives, background, organization, and personalities of the rebels. At corps level, political intelligence was essential, given the political-military nature of the intervention; it was also in short supply. Initially, corps intelligence did not have attached to it a political officer versed in Dominican history and politics. It therefore depended on other in-country U.S. resources for a panoramic view of what was transpiring. The Sans Souci interrogations helped to reduce this dependency. So, too, did disenchanted Constitutionalists, who were recruited by MI personnel, debriefed at safe houses, and sent back to their rebel bands to gather additional information. Handling these informants without compromising them was a delicate task. So, too, was crossing into the rebel zone to get a first-

hand look at conditions there. For that mission, MI and Special Forces personnel needed civilian clothing, forged documents, proficiency in Spanish, and luck. During the early days of the intervention, all but the last commodity were in short supply. Even when an operative completed a successful reconnaissance, he still had to reenter the LOC. Dressed in mufti and without official identification, he had to convince a checkpoint guard with no knowledge of the operation that they both worked for the U.S. military. One way around this difficulty was to take Green Berets who knew about the covert activities and station them at various checkpoints to identify the returning infiltrators.[14]

Another military source of intelligence was aerial reconnaissance and photography. The 82d had its own aviation battalion, which after 4 May met some of the division's need for aerial reconnaissance, although other duties prevented Army aircraft from being used solely for that purpose. More suited to the task was the Air Force's 363d Composite Reconnaissance Squadron, which arrived at Ramey AFB on 2 May. Composed of six RF-101s, three RB-66s, and an augmented photo-processing cell, the squadron provided aerial photographs on request. During political negotiations, the photos provided a means of verifying whether either side had violated agreed-upon troop dispositions. For tactical purposes, aerial shots revealed not only the location of troops but also key urban terrain features that did not appear on military maps, including the detailed city maps that were available to U.S. troops after 7 May.

Air Force reconnaissance flights began on 3 May but immediately encountered difficulties. Inclement weather and restrictions that prohibited flights below 1,500 feet over Santo Domingo impeded performance. More important, units in need of up-to-date information complained about the lag time between the request for aerial photos and their delivery. Army units wanted no more than a five- to six-hour turnaround but often experienced delays of up to twelve hours between submitting a request and receiving the desired photos. That each request had to pass through TF 120 for approval before being forwarded to the Joint Air Force/Army, Direct Air Support Center for implementation accounted for part of the problem. Excessive demands for prints and duplications compounded the delays by overwhelming the capabilities of the photo processing unit. A 50 percent reduction in the print distribution list and the dispatch of an MI warrant officer to familiarize the photo processing unit with Army requirements helped to reduce the delivery time. Even so, Palmer, while benefiting from the political intelligence provided in aerial photos, reported that Air Force reconnaissance was never fully exploited for tactical purposes.[15]

Despite the variety of problems encountered in gathering information about the rebels, by mid-May, U.S. troops had a fairly accurate order of battle and other essential information about opposing forces in Santo Domingo.[16] The new estimates reduced the number of rebels to between 2,000 and 4,000, operating in 15- to 20-man commando units, each responsible for a certain portion of the city. The commandos ostensibly fought for Caamaño, but most analysts and several rebels, including Caamaño in a

few candid moments, doubted that he exerted firm control over all the small bands. Many of the commando groups operated behind the façade of a labor union, student body, political party, or some other organization. Military intelligence had identified the commanders of most units and their headquarters. The U.S. soldiers who manned checkpoints possessed updated wanted lists of individuals who should be detained on sight.[17] The current intelligence about the Constitutionalist forces in Santo Domingo did not end the sniping incidents and firefights, but it gave soldiers on the front line a much better idea of what they were up against.

Military commanders plagued during the early days of the intervention by a dearth of information concerning the status of rebels in Santo Domingo knew even less about conditions throughout the Dominican Republic. Was the rebellion spreading beyond the capital? Would Washington soon face a Communist insurgency in the countryside? Lyndon Johnson wanted to know. More to the point, he became obsessed with finding out. The new director of central intelligence, Admiral Raborn, was the first to feel the pressure from the White House. Raborn, in turn, asked David Phillips, designated to take over as chief of station in the Dominican Republic in early June, how many men the agency had reporting from the countryside. Phillips replied that there was an agent in Santiago. More to the point, he reported that liaison contacts and agents monitoring the Dominican government's communications reported that, in general, the countryside was quiet. The civil war was having little serious impact outside the capital. This news satisfied neither the president nor Raborn, the latter of whom issued what to Phillips was a "ridiculous order" to send CIA officers into the interior. Phillips complied and sent nine men into the countryside on 2 May. The most urgent message he received once his teams fanned out was from a chief of outpost complaining, "The mosquitoes are killing us."[18]

Like their CIA counterparts, the U.S. military commanders in the Dominican Republic also learned that one could not ignore the curiosity of their demanding commander in chief. Following LBJ's meeting with his advisers on 1 May, General Wheeler dispatched a message that began, "At highest level meeting this morning it was recognized that intelligence and activities of dissident groups outside the Santo Domingo area is sparse." To correct the deficiency, Ambassador Bennett, the U.S. military, and the CIA were to mount "a coordinated effort to obtain [the] needed information." The military was to provide ground vehicles and helicopters for the undertaking, "to include using medical evacuation helicopters marked with the Red Cross." The next day, Bennett reported that he and Palmer concurred in the importance of the mission and hoped to launch it the next morning. The code name of the operation would be Green Chopper.[19]

The XVIII Airborne Corps, the Embassy, the CIA, and AID coordinated and executed the first Green Chopper missions. Assessment teams visited seven towns between 3 and 5 May in order "to determine popular feelings and to assess political, military, and economic conditions." While this was taking place, the 7th Special Forces Group(-) arrived from Fort Bragg. The

group's arrival was not atypical of units entering the country in the later echelons of Power Pack. At Pope AFB, the Green Berets had received a "space available" priority; that is, they experienced the chaos of scrambling for whatever seats they could find aboard available aircraft. They arrived at San Isidro with little information or essential equipment, "completely inadequate" communications for field work, and too many operational and too few support personnel (cooks, mechanics, communicators, etc.). Despite these problems, once enough men and equipment had been assembled on 4 May, the unit became operational under Palmer's command. The next day, the Green Berets took over the Green Chopper missions, driving or flying in civilian clothes to towns throughout the countryside, often accompained by Embassy or AID personnel to lend credibility to cover stories about conducting economic, agrigultural, or medical surveys. Working undercover, the men established residency in their assigned towns and began collecting information. (Over time, the cover stories broke down because the Special Forces teams "were using U.S. Army equipment and were resupplied by U.S. Army personnel using military aircraft.") Between thirty-four and fifty towns were visited, several of which were short on critical supplies. There was also an occasional anti-American agitator to be found. But on the whole, the Special Forces reports for Green Chopper confirmed what Phillips had told Raborn: the countryside was quiet. Lyndon Johnson could rest easy. There was no incipient insurgency in the interior. The fate of the Dominican Republic would be determined in Santo Domingo, where the presence of U.S. troops precluded the possibility of a rebel victory by military means.[20]

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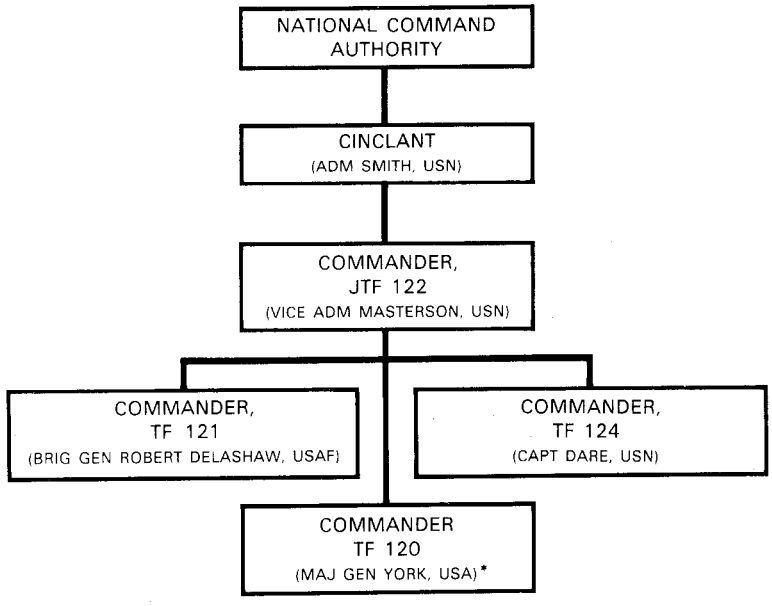
While MI officers, Special Forces, and various staffs worked to improve the quality of intelligence available to U.S. forces in the Dominican Republic, an effort was under way to streamline the chain of command from Washington to Santo Domingo and to upgrade the communications available to military commanders in the field, particularly Palmer.[21] The two efforts were interrelated. Upon his arrival, Palmer had become the de facto land force commander (see figures 2 and 3), but his formal elevation to Commander, United States Forces, Dominican Republic (USCOMDOMREP) did not occur until one week later. The delay in upgrading his status from a task force commander in charge of all U.S. Army and Marine elements ashore to that of the commander of a Joint Headquarters, U.S. Forces, Dominican Republic (USFORDOMREP), stemmed from an unanticipated shortcoming: for nearly a week, Palmer lacked an independent network that would allow him to communicate with the numerous people both in the Dominican Republic and abroad whom his new responsibilities would require him to consult on a daily basis.

When Palmer entered the country on 1 May, he brought with him only the small portion of the XVIII Airborne Corps' signal elements authorized by Wheeler. The 82d's communications equipment at San Isidro enhanced his meager capabilities, but not by much. Both corps and division communications were geared to tactical operations involving relatively short



*For a short period, Maj. Gen. York commanded all land forces ashore.

Figure 2. U.S. command relationships, 30 April 1965

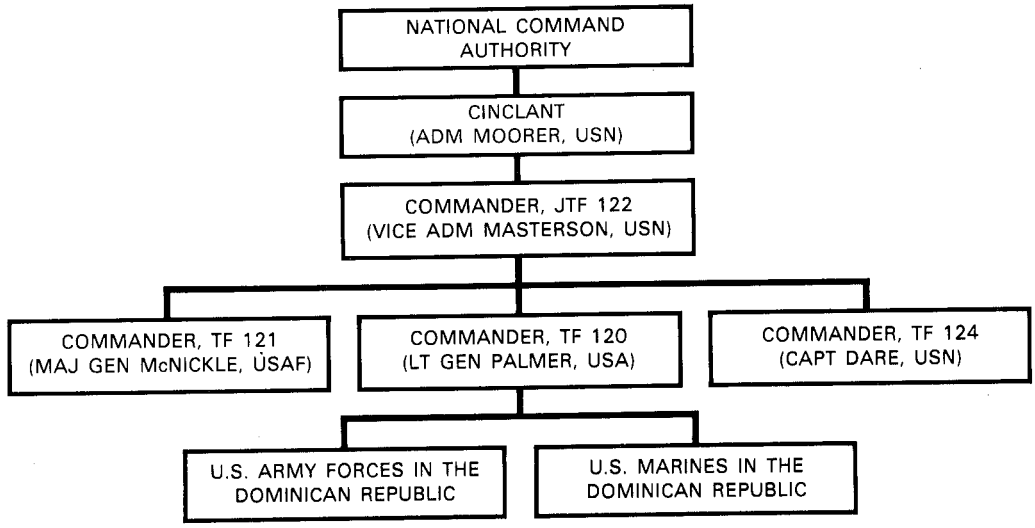
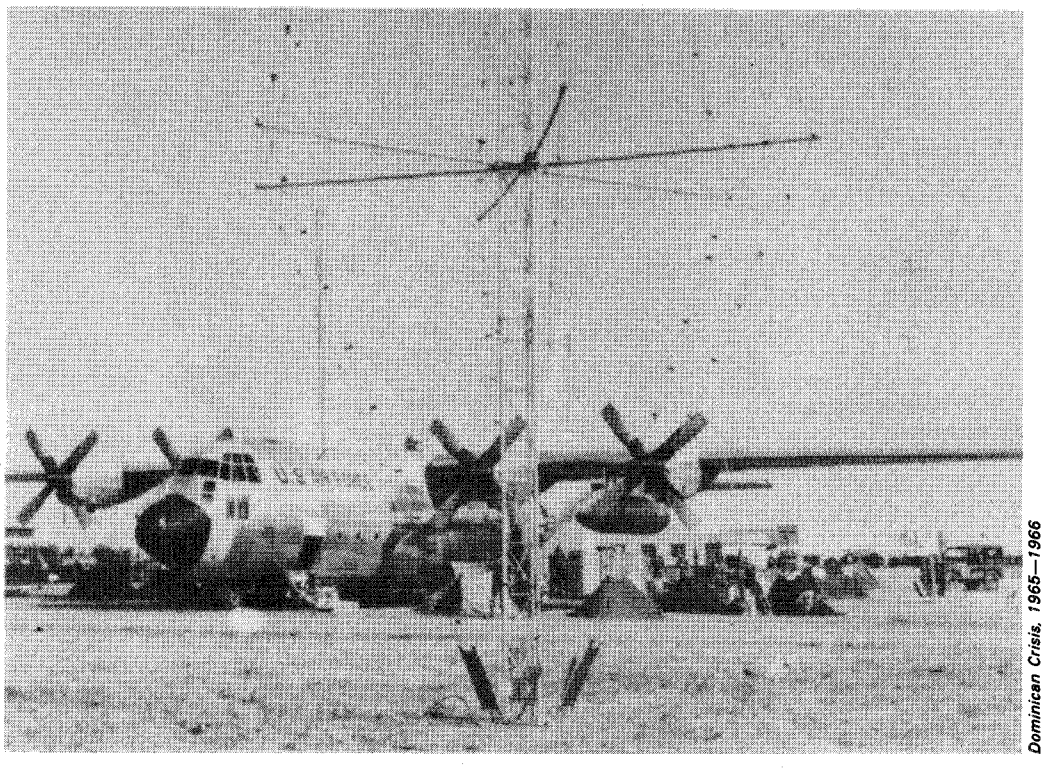


Figure 3. U.S. command relationships, 1 May 1965

distances. But by direction of the JCS, Palmer was to assume the role of a theater commander, which meant he needed a *strategic* communications capability that would enable him to contact policymakers far from Dominican shores. Until he acquired this capability, he made do with what he had. By midmorning on the 1st, his small Special Security Office—a special



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U.S. Air Force C-130 "talking bird" at San Isidro

communications detachment with its own codes—had established secure communications with Fort Bragg and DA, enabling Palmer to send his first back-channel message to General Wheeler. By afternoon, Palmer could talk from San Isidro directly with Masterson on the *Boxer*, even though the admiral's flag ship could only operate on one of several radio nets and had to lower its antenna—and thus cease communications—during flight operations off its deck. (On 3 May, Masterson transferred his flag to the *Newport News*, which had excellent communication facilities for joint operations.) Also, once Palmer discovered that the Air Force's "talking bird" had landed at San Isidro (a fact unknown to the corps' signal officer), the general used the plane's sophisticated communications gear to talk with the president and other Washington officials.

But these communications capabilities were still woefully inadequate and, more important, inconvenient, being located at San Isidro. Palmer, realizing the soundness of Wheeler's advice to work as closely as possible with Ambassador Bennett, wanted to move his headquarters next door to the U.S. Embassy as soon as possible. On 2 May, he transferred his command post by helicopter (no overland route being available yet) to the Embassy grounds; the remainder of his headquarters at San Isidro was instructed to follow as soon as it acquired the means to do so. Bennett readily shared the Embassy's communications facilities with the general, but these, too, left much to be desired. The only reliable communication

between the Embassy and Masterson was by helicopter and ham radio. Cable traffic with Washington was secure, but telephone contact was being monitored by the rebels who controlled the telephone exchange. Palmer tried to solve his problem by requesting CINCSTRIKE, General Adams, to loan him one of STRICOM's two Joint Communications Support Elements, which were tailor-made for the sort of independent and secure strategic capability Palmer so desperately needed. But CINCSTRIKE refused without comment, although Palmer later concluded that Adams, who had collided with CINCLANT during the early phases of the crisis, had adopted a "dog-in-the-manger" attitude, withholding from Palmer (and, indirectly, from CINCLANT) a communications element Adams could easily have parted with on a temporary basis.

The Defense Communication Agency rescued Palmer from the dismal situation he confronted. It provided long-range communications that enabled him on 3 May to move his headquarters into the former Trujillo residence next to the Embassy and, on 4 May, to communicate with CINCLANT without having to use Masterson, the JTF commander, as a go-between. On the 4th, Palmer became Commander, U.S. Land Forces, Dominican Republic (LAND FORCES ASHORE) (see figure 4), with Masterson still controlling the forces assigned to the intervention with the exception of the Army and Marine units under Palmer's command. A debate ensued as to whether Palmer or Masterson would control the Air Force Task Force 121. Palmer prevailed. On 7 May, the day he formally became the commander of what was in essence a subunified command under LANTCOM (see figure 5), Palmer exercised operational control over all Army forces, the 4th MEB, and all Air Force and Navy elements in-country. The Navy Task Force 124 and the Air Force Task Force 121 retained a separate identity under CINCLANT but were placed in support of Palmer's joint headquarters, USFORDOMREP. Under these arrangements, JTF 122 became a redundant command and, according to doctrine, was disestablished.

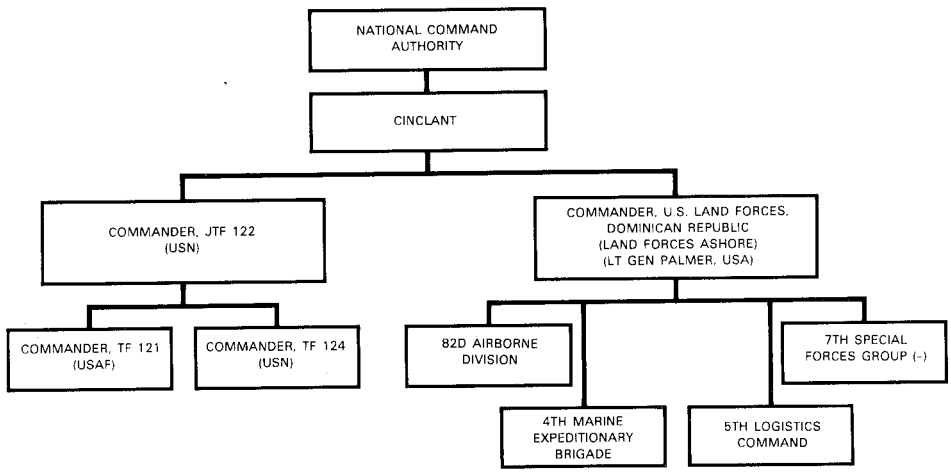
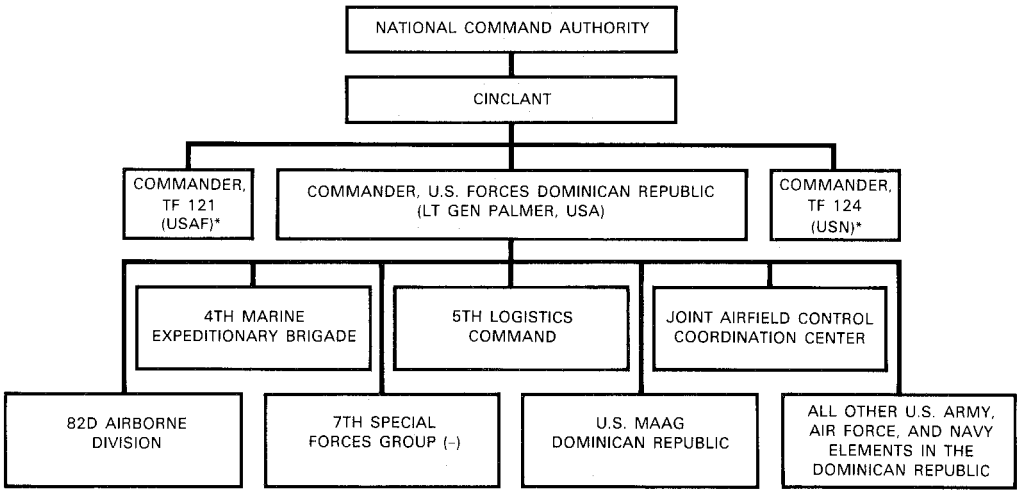


Figure 4. U.S. command relationships, 4—6 May 1965



*TF 121 and TF 124 assumed supporting roles to the ground forces, with General Palmer authorized direct liaison with the commanders of each TF in order to levy support requirements. In December 1965, the JCS dissolved TF 121 and TF 124 and established a permanent headquarters command for all U.S. forces in the Dominican Republic.

Figure 5. U.S. command relationships, 7 May 1965

Palmer's new title did not appreciably alter his relationship with the Embassy's Country Team. As ambassador, Bennett would exercise responsibility for policy execution but not operational control over U.S. troops, although prior to Palmer's appointment, Washington had given Bennett a good deal of latitude in directing the movement of those forces. With Palmer on the scene, that would change, but not dramatically unless the ambassador and the general disagreed over the deployment and activities of the troops. In that case, Palmer, now Bennett's senior military adviser, would argue his position not only with the ambassador but up the military chain of command, from CINCLANT to the JCS (the latter of whom would present his position to the secretary of defense and the president). But such divisive disagreement rarely occurred. Palmer felt that Bennett on occasion excluded him from critical information, and this led to some stormy sessions. But on the whole, the two men established a close and cordial working relationship and personal friendship as they coordinated efforts to use the U.S. military presence to the best advantage in seeking a political settlement.

* * *

Political maneuvering among all parties to the conflict began the day after the establishment of the LOC demonstrated U.S. power and ended any possibility of an all-out rebel attack on the San Isidro junta. Denied a military victory, the rebels quickly shifted tactics and launched a vigorous political-propaganda offensive, the first shot of which came on 4 May, when a Constitutionalist "congress" elected Caamaño "president" of the country. While these ceremonies were taking place, U.S. officials were

pursuing their own campaign to form a more suitable government. Essentially this meant easing out Colonel Benoit's San Isidro junta—identified by too many Dominicans with reaction and repression—and finding an alternative government that would enjoy popular support. Here LBJ's emissary, John Bartlow Martin, with Ambassador Bennett's support, took the lead by championing General Imbert, a man still regarded by many Dominicans (although fewer than Martin realized) as a national hero for his role in assassinating Trujillo. Imbert had a private army of 2,000 men, but what made him an attractive candidate in Martin's eyes was the estrangement between the general and the San Isidro officers, including Wessin. Caamaño, Martin knew, would never deal with Wessin, the man most rebels blamed for starting the civil war. But, Martin believed, "a rapprochement between Caamaño and Imbert was not impossible."

Prompted by U.S. officials, Imbert would head a slate of five candidates who would constitute a Government of National Reconstruction (GNR). Imbert picked Benoit immediately as the second candidate so as not to alienate completely the existing junta. The other three candidates were to be civilians, but delays arose in trying to recruit them. As Bennett reported to State, few persons were qualified for the positions, and most who were expressed their reluctance to serve. After a rigorous search, the candidates materialized, and on 7 May, Imbert was sworn in as president of the GNR. Bennett recommended immediate U.S. recognition of the new government, but State demurred: such a move could adversely affect the next step in the stabilization process as envisaged by Washington and the OAS—namely, arranging an agreement between "President" Caamaño and "President" Imbert to form a provisional government committed to early elections. Even though both "governments" encouraged this expectation when they signed the Act of Santo Domingo, an OAS-drafted document that spelled out in greater detail the cease-fire accord, the rapprochement Martin predicted proved elusive.[22]

At first, the main stumbling block to an accord between the GNR and the Constitutionalists seemed to be Caamaño's insistence that he would not meet with Imbert until certain officers linked to the San Isidro group left the country. U.S. officials persuaded Imbert to accept the condition, but the key to progress was Wessin, an "honorable man," according to Bennett, but the "bete-noir of the revolution." When Wessin promised Palmer and Bennett that he would resign for the sake of the country and accept a position abroad, prospects for peace improved.

In an all too familiar pattern, they just as quickly declined. Against the background of cease-fire violations on both sides, efforts to get Caamaño and Imbert together proved futile. Bennett, Palmer, and Martin doubted that Caamaño was a "free agent"; Martin suspected that radical elements within the colonel's entourage were deliberately trying to sabotage a political compromise. Caamaño, for his part, expressed similar sentiments about Imbert, whom he saw as the puppet of the Trujillist generals, particularly Wessin, who had immediately "welched" on his pledge to leave the country. Bennett also reported that the GNR, after an encouraging begin-

ning, was encountering difficulties in trying to run the country. He attributed this, in part, to the fact that the GNR controlled neither the critical Dominican financial institutions located in Ciudad Nueva nor the industrial plants north of the LOC. Most of all, Bennett believed, the government suffered from the constant barrage of vituperative anti-American, anti-GNR propaganda spewing forth from Radio Santo Domingo. He denounced the propaganda offensive as the "main thorn in GNR's (and our) side." But if the Constitutionalists were proving intransigent, so was Imbert. U.S. officials began to doubt whether the general would accept Caamaño or any of his followers into a new government. Imbert talked increasingly about taking military action against the rebels, a course from which Martin tried to dissuade him by arguing that GNR forces could not defeat Caamaño's, even if the United States would allow them to try, which, Martin declared, it would not.[23]

Martin should not have been so categorical. As the chances for an early political settlement slipped away, the possibility of some form of military action increased dramatically. An incident on 13 May illustrated the danger. Without consulting U.S. officials, Imbert sent five F-51s to knock out Radio Santo Domingo. The planes hit the target, taking it off the air for the remainder of the day, but one pilot fired erratically into U.S., rebel, *and Loyalist* positions near the radio station, wounding one U.S. marine. In perhaps the only display of true unity during the intervention, Americans, Loyalists, and Constitutionalists all returned fire and succeeded in downing the errant flyer, who was then rescued by a U.S. helicopter. Bennett lodged a protest with the OAS Commission over this flagrant violation of the cease-fire, but in his report to Washington, he admitted that it was "hard to rap GNR for having taken an action to remove installation which was poisoning whole body politic." In another indication of his private sentiments, Bennett had already voiced his concern that U.S. neutrality during the political negotiations was working against the GNR and assisting the rebels in consolidating what positions they held in the key northern industrial area of the city. The military situation, in his view, was unclear but not good, and while the United States would continue to work for a political solution, it could not discount the possibility of being "compelled to assist GNR militarily if present situation deteriorates to point of becoming untenable."[24]

For Bennett and Palmer, the immediate source of military concern was the situation north of the LOC. Since 10 May, rebel forces had been attacking GNR troops stationed in the strategically located Transportation Headquarters. In response to the fighting, Imbert was infiltrating reinforcements into the area. Meanwhile, economic life in the north had come to a standstill as factories closed. Food riots soon broke out. It was an intolerable situation that had to be dealt with swiftly if the city hoped to avoid even greater economic chaos. Based on their own observations and a gloomy report from the OAS Commission, Bennett and Palmer held little hope for a political solution to the problem. As Palmer wrote, echoing Bennett's previous warning, "military actions may be soon required to

break the present stalemate and make any progress towards stability and establish law and order." The question was, who would take the required action?[25]

On 13 May, Palmer and Bennett recommended unilateral U.S. military action to restore order north of the LOC. The operation would take place in three phases. Phase I would involve extending the LOC in a search and clear operation that would seize Radio Santo Domingo. Phase II would involve extending the ISZ northward to Avenida San Martín, which would serve as the line of departure for Phase III, a sweep of the north to the Isabela River. During the last phase, rebel forces would be captured or destroyed, and industrial complexes would be seized and secured. Bennett and Palmer predicted that Dominicans in northern Santo Domingo would welcome the restoration of order and economic activity. While this plan was working its way through channels to Washington, Imbert informed Martin that his forces in the north, some 600 to 900 men, were under orders to extend their control gradually throughout the industrial area.[26] A major military confrontation with the rebels, initiated by U.S. forces or GNR troops or the two working together, seemed but hours away.

This was not welcome news to President Johnson, who, unlike U.S. officials on the scene, tended to blame Imbert for the drift toward military action. "I'm not going down in history as the man responsible for putting another Trujillo in power," he is reported to have said in referring to the

Lyndon B. Johnson Library

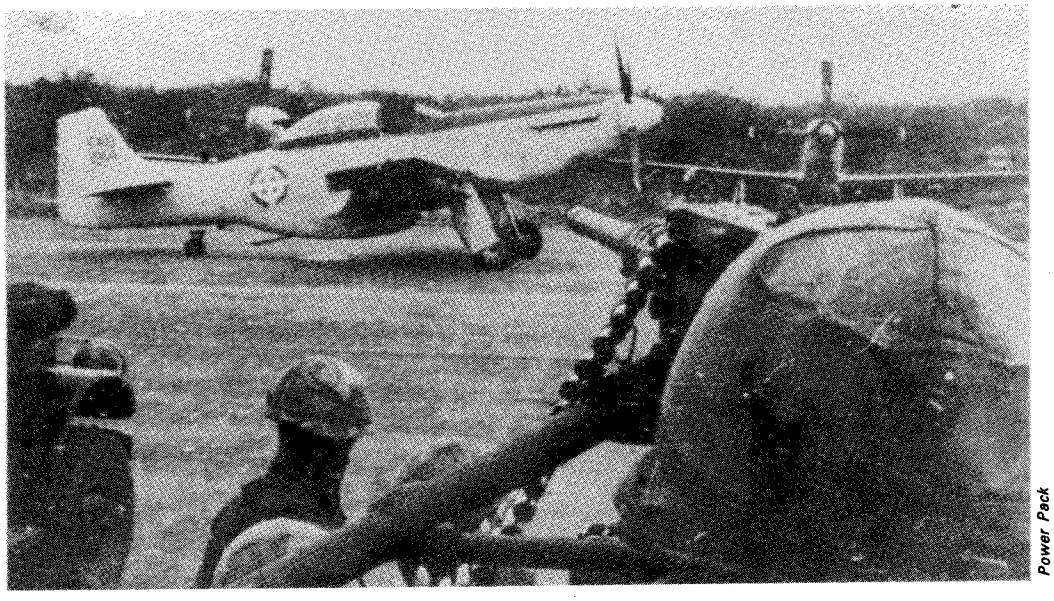
President Johnson with his national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy

general. Hoping to be able to restore order through diplomatic means, LBJ decided to send Bundy, Vance, Mann, and Vaughn to Santo Domingo. The thrust of Bundy's instructions was to sacrifice the GNR, if necessary, in favor of a more moderate government that would guarantee the safety of the Dominican military and the removal or detention of Communists and Castroites. Palmer, upon hearing that the mission was en route, was not pleased. To him, it was but another example of interference from higher political authorities who lacked an in-depth appreciation of the complexity of the "local picture." Bundy's team, he later commented sarcastically, expected to achieve a "quick and dirty" settlement within forty-eight hours. To Palmer, this constituted pure fantasy.[27]

Bundy and the others arrived in Santo Domingo on 15 May, the very day Imbert mounted a massive offensive, *operación limpieza* (Operation Cleanup), to clear all rebels out of the north. Most U.S. officials and military officers in Santo Domingo knew of the impending attack and gave it their tacit blessing. Charges that American troops actually assisted in the operation, either actively or by allowing GNR troops to cross the LOC into the north, have never been substantiated. As a rule, Imbert circumvented the LOC in transporting his forces north. If some trucks did pass through the LOC, it was an exception to the rule and done without Palmer's approval. Palmer did authorize two-man U.S. liaison teams to meet with GNR soldiers in the field so that as Imbert's sweep approached the LOC, the risk of firing into U.S. positions would be minimized.[28]

Contrary to the expectations of American officers, Imbert's offensive appeared as though it would succeed, albeit at a very bloody cost in rebel and innocent civilian lives. At the Embassy, Bundy and others consulted with Washington about sending U.S. troops north to establish a new, north-south LOC that would, as with the current east-west one, separate the two sides. Although Palmer indicated that this could be done, he was skeptical about sending American troops into the middle of a situation in which they might be fired on from both sides. As it turned out, planning for the new corridor could not keep pace with GNR advances; while Washington was still considering the proposal, Imbert completed his sweep of the north, clearing out the rebels and capturing Radio Santo Domingo.[29]

The success of *operación limpieza* had several consequences, some anticipated, some not. The rebels were now truly isolated in Ciudad Nueva, and Imbert began putting pressure on the United States to let his troops cross the LOC, the only barrier to total victory. York sympathized with the request. (On 19 May, the 82d had published its own contingency plan for reducing the rebel stronghold.) But Washington emphatically disagreed. There would be no further major military engagements by either side; the United States would see to it. On 16 May, while Imbert's offensive was still in progress, Palmer received an indication of what was to come when LBJ instructed him to use U.S. forces to prevent GNR naval and air force units from taking part in the fighting. At San Isidro, the U.S. battalion charged with airfield security immediately moved obstacles onto the runway even as GNR pilots were starting the engines of their F-51s. By 21 May,



Power Pack

U.S. paratroopers as they prevent F-51s from taking off at San Isidro airfield

when a Red Cross-negotiated truce became a new cease-fire at OAS urging, U.S. behavior was truly neutral for the first time since the beginning of the crisis.[30]

Neutrality did not hasten a political solution. Having suffered the reversal in the north, Caamaño was more amenable to talking, but Imbert, "flushed with success," was not. Bundy's efforts to organize a provisional government around Silvestre Antonio Guzmán, a moderate *PRD* member, broke down because Imbert would not accept the arrangement and because, at the last minute, Guzmán reneged on his promise to exile various Communist leaders. Palmer endured no distress over the failure of the Guzmán formula. Although as a military man he did not say so for the record, the general believed, as did Imbert, that a Guzmán government would be dominated or taken over by the Communists.[31] When Bundy realized the futility of his efforts, he packed his bags and turned further peace negotiations over to the OAS.

With the failure of the Bundy mission at the end of May, a political solution to the Dominican crisis seemed a distant hope at best. American troops would remain in the country for an indefinite time, not so much to fight as to serve as peacekeepers. The work entailed would be at times challenging and dangerous, at other times frustrating and tedious. To the individual soldier, the nightly firefights and his noncombat duties would become a matter of routine to which he would adjust. But few really comprehended why the United States, with the military power it had assembled in Santo Domingo, simply could not take military action to secure a political settlement. Not to let soldiers do what they were trained to do seemed confusing, even senseless.